

Group Interview featuring Michael Fields '69, Clinton Etheridge '69, James White '73, Harold Buchanan '69

Conducted by Xavier Lee, Martin Froger-Silva, Davis Logan, Noah Morrison

Michael Fields '69, Clinton Etheridge '69, and Harold Buchanan '69 were all key players in various forms in the foundation of SASS and the 1969 Parrish Takeover. They each had unique experiences at Swarthmore College over the course of their concurrent four years. However, in different capacities, each of their experiences was molded by their identity as marginalized Black students on campus. This drove them to organize, which led to the creation of SASS. Clinton Etheridge '69 became SASS chairman for the 1968-69 academic year. James White '73 came in the year after the 1969 Parrish Takeover and quickly became an integral part of SASS. He participated in the 1970 takeover of the President's office and the 1970 procession to the President's house.

Xavier Lee: Hi, my name is Xavier Lee and I'm a sophomore here at the college. Before we start this group interview I'd like everyone to go around and say their name and their class year.

James White: Start here? Jim White, class of '73.

Clinton Etheridge: Clinton Etheridge, class of 1969.

Harold Buchanan: Harold Buchanan, '69

Michael Fields: Michael Fields, '69.

XL: So I guess we'll start off with the question regarding the documentary that was played – an excerpt of which was played for Garnet Weekend, not Garnet Weekend...[interviewers interrupt] Alumni Weekend. So the prompt is: In *Minding Swarthmore*, a documentary by alumnus Shayne Lightner, [Class of 1987]. Marilyn Allman Maye states clearly that distinctions were drawn between the men and women of SASS in terms of the organization and Black student movement and protest action of 1969. What were the roles of men and women in the planning, execution and aftermath of the protest? Were these roles static and imposed or dynamic and understood within SASS? As in, were they kind of discussed, was it saying “the men are going to do this and the women are going to do that” or was it kind of understood from the way that things were going and did the stance change throughout the duration of the protest. So if anyone wants to jump in...

HB: Boy, that's hot. [room laughs] The women aren't here today.

MF: And I was going to say that I have no knowledge so it looks like its on you two [To Etheridge and Buchanan] [room laughs]

JW: That's why we're on the wings.

CE: So let me start, get my preliminary thoughts and then others can join in. There were more Black women than there were Black men at Swarthmore back then and there were more Black women in SASS than there were Black men in SASS and I think that the Seven Sisters, as they were affectionately known, made the decision that the chairman and vice-chairman positions would be held by black men. So the first SASS chairman was Sam Shepard (class of '68). I was the first vice-chairman. This was academic year '67-'68. And my senior year, which was '68-'69, I was elected to be the SASS chairman and Don Mizell was the SASS vice-chairman. SASS started meeting – or the Black students even before we have had the name of SASS started meeting in '66, I think it was the fall of 66. I was one of the founding fathers, Harold was a founding father, but there were a lot of founding mothers, too in SASS. And I can just speak for myself – I was very dedicated to the welfare of SASS and so was Sam Shepard, the late Sam Shepard, who was the first SASS chairman. And so we were very dedicated to the welfare of SASS. I'm not sure there was a clear division of labor or specialization of function between the men and the women, but I think we were all committed to the overall goals of SASS which were the recruitment of more Black students, quality of Black student life at Swarthmore, recruitment of Black professors. Black administrators and the incorporation of Black courses into the curriculum. But there were differences of opinion on how to achieve those things – when, how, tactics – but I think there was commitment to the overall goals and vision of SASS of both the men and the women, the founding fathers and the founding mothers.

HB: Yeah, I'll add that those differences of opinion really had nothing to do with gender. There were differences amongst the men and the women, there were people in all kinds of spectrum. There were people with SASS, people who weren't with SASS, there were people who were more radical, people who were less radical and that really had nothing to do with gender. We didn't really have a committee to sit down and say "What should the role of men be and what should the role of women be?"

CE: [laughs] That's true

HB: From that perspective, the question doesn't really fit. The only time I recall the discussion of roles was when we were looking to say who should be the spokesperson, the chairman, the titular leader of the organization. Because of the times we were in, in the Black community in general, there was a sensitivity about the role of men and the role of women and for that reason there was a discussion that the leader of the organization—that it would be better politically for the leader of the organization to be a male. So for that reason, a lot of people felt, and definitely the Seven Sisters felt, that the leader should be a male.

MF: And for those of us who were not in the inner counsels of SASS but were involved in our own different ways in terms of what was going on, there certainly was no perception among others that there was – that the guys were doing one thing, and the women were not. And I don't know that anybody – at least that I would know – thought

that it was odd that you and Don were the public face whereas, as you said, most of the group—there were a lot of women in the group.

HB: Yeah, there were a lot of involved in the planning and the idea and the creation and the execution of things but when it came down to who should be the official spokesperson then it was agreed that the leader should be a man. And I think everyone agreed with that, wouldn't you say?

CE: Right. I wrote this article, the Crucible of Character, and in it I said my style was to be collegial and consensus – I considered myself a first among equals. We all know Swarthmore students; they're bright, aggressive, very opinionated so I don't think there could have been one person or one group that could have dominated that. There were so many personalities, so many strong personalities, and I think it was for the most part an organization that for the most part operated on consensus decision-making. And I as SASS chairman tried to be as collegial as possible and tried to forge consensus for the group as we moved forward.

HB: Yeah I think that was a real good point. We were definitely in the Quaker tradition of consensus [group laughs] and there were a lot of opinions going on, people got their opinions aired very thoroughly and then we came to agreement and we moved on.

CE: And I think the thing that bound us together was, as I said earlier, the commitment to the vision of SASS and the need to work on the priorities of Black student enrollment, quality of Black student life, Black professors and Black administrators and Black courses so I think that was the tie that bound people.

XL: Alright so I suppose we can move on to the second question. So the Black Studies of Swarthmore College has its roots in this protest. Two of you were acting members in it and others were seeing what was going on if not acting in it themselves. The Black Studies Program at Swarthmore, like many other colleges, faced adversity from the faculty and student community at its founding. This adversity persists as Black Studies remains an interdisciplinary program rather than a department comprised only one class that's specific to Black Studies, which is Intro Black Studies, and no acting tenured faculty members. So could you please explain what your vision was for the Black Studies program and how it came into the whole protest movement as well as talk about any models that you saw in its conception?

HB: [To Etheridge] Do you want to take that?

CE: Well, the Black Studies program was established after I graduated in June 1969 and in fact the BCC was established after I left. So I was not really involved in the implementation of the Black Studies courses or even the BCC. Others were more involved with that then I was. In '69, I think there was a strong vision of it but without a specific program that we wanted to implement. That was my sense of it, that there was a vision that we wanted to have Black courses but there was a specific time—

HB: Well we had done some things during our time and there was a small number – handful of us who graduated with a concentration in Black Studies. It wasn't a formal program but we did convince the college to create a concentration in Black Studies and it was four classes or five classes or whatever that you had to take. And we were able to find a program in the last couple years identified that could be a part of that concentration. So we did get some classes on campus and some classes off-campus at Lincoln University, for example. We did not, as Clinton said, we did not have a curriculum in mind. The idea was that the Black experience in the United States and the world is a part of history and wasn't thoroughly being discussed within history or within anthropology and so it was a gap that needed to be filled. It wasn't like we really needed a Black concentration because the rest of the traditional curriculum is ignoring it or pushing it aside. That's what the perspective is. You don't really need it if everything were done properly, if it had a proper place within the context of things. You wouldn't need anything special.

MF: Right, and I think one of the things that you'd see in terms of not just but how historiography has developed since that period that certain topics as a result of the foment coming out of the Black Studies movement, slavery, for example, abolition, have been and are being looked at in different ways than they were back then. I would also say that I think – and I may be out of school here, so one of them might want to correct me. But I think SASS's concerns were more conceptual rather than specific. Because what you're speaking to in this question are, sort of, very specific and programmatic concerns and I think what SASS was more interested in was establishing a principle. First of all, that there should be some of these things acknowledged on the same level and with the same degree of seriousness as the quote "classical standard curriculum" was. Point one. And point two: the Black folks should have some say in what that was, who was involved with it, and what was going to be in it. Because that's what you have to have first before any of these programmatic specifics can be worked out. Just to again, help you understand where Swarthmore was at that time was that Sociology, when we entered as freshmen, was not an accepted academic discipline at Swarthmore because it was not considered to be academically rigorous enough for consideration in the Swarthmore curriculum. Sociology didn't become – there were some courses taught... what would have been our junior year, '68, the same way that I would imagine the courses, Black Studies courses were, some folks were offering these things. The next year, '69, was the first year it [Sociology] becomes a major, and that year, as I recall, that year it becomes the largest major in the school. So that is just to, in a sense, give you a context of where Swarthmore was vis-à-vis its vision of what the academic canon was and sociology was not part of it.

HB: Yeah, just an example of the Western education as embodied within Swarthmore College. It just tends to drag its feet at some of those things, and while they're trying to get consensus they end up being four or five hundred years behind the rest of the world. Our thinking at the time was that we need to get stuff done now. Throughout high school and junior high school people weren't being taught anything, so we had a lot of catching up to do. We needed some specific things taught, but it was really to fill the gaps in and it was only because Western education was failing and deficient in that area and whatever was needed to fill those deficiencies was what was needed. So, if the question is if we

look at the program today and say “Did that fit our vision?”, the real question is does it fit the needs of what students need today? Looking at what educational needs you have in terms of Black Studies in the program that we have, does it fulfill those needs? Is it sufficient? Students who are here on campus are probably in the best position to determine that.

MF: Right, and I would also, to follow up on what Harold just said, [HW interjects: I suspect it is not.] I also would say your needs have changed because clearly the way that we were thinking about our education seems to be very different from the way you guys are thinking about yours. So that’s also something else to put in the mix too. What I mean by that is that you guys seem to be a bit more career focused; looking for more of a connection to what you’re doing to how that’s going to lead you to a specific job or what your career is going to be after Swarthmore. Those were not necessarily – I can’t speak for Clinton or Harold – but I don’t think for a lot of us that was the major thing at that time. It was a lot vaguer in the sense that this was a whole new world that we were entering into and we did not have to be quite as goal-oriented as quickly as it seems you kids – guys – need to. I don’t mean any disrespect in referring to you as kids its just, you know you...

CE: I think that most Swarthmore students back then thought they were going to graduate school but they didn’t know specifically what careers they might end up in. Graduate school was probably in their plan, but the specific career that they would end up pursuing, I don’t think.... There was one guy in our class whose (sic) was pre-med in September of ’65....

HB: Was it Jeff? Jeff Bancuba who was pre-med?

CE: No, this was John Rodgers, Felix John Rodgers. He was Michael Gray’s roommate our freshman year. But he was a special circumstance because his father was a doctor, his mother was a doctor, his brother was a doctor. So it was easy for him to say, “I want to be a doctor.” And he did become a doctor. I think he’s a cardiologist now. But he was sort of the exception. Nobody else had that kind of clear vision of this is what I want to be when I grow up or this is the career I want except Felix John Rodgers. He was the only one I remember.

MF: I also had a few friends who were – and it was usually, now that you mention it Clinton, it usually was the pre-meds who were a bit more focused past Swarthmore in terms of... because they had to start setting stuff up right away because they needed to get things in line to be able to get into medical school. Which, if you were going to another kind of grad school, or if you were going to law school you had more time to figure things out. You know I have a friend who started out as an engineer, she was a she, and she ran into some gender issues in the engineering department and she decided she didn’t want to be an engineer and ended up doing something else and there was a lot, a lot, a lot of that going on. I’m also going to throw in one other thing in terms of what Clinton mentioned about grad school. We also, as guys, and this is not a racial issue, but it also had a bearing in terms of how we were thinking about our futures then too and that

was Vietnam. A lot of people might not necessarily have been thinking about graduate school if it wasn't going to keep them out of the army. There are a lot of issues about that. If you had been a sophomore, or if you were a senior in '68-'69, that was all we were thinking about.

HB: Depending on what your number was....

MF: Well, you didn't get a number until '70.

JW: 1970. I was a freshman then.

HB: But, getting back to the original question, Jim you were here when the curriculum actually got started. So did you have any involvement in that?

JW: Yeah, I don't know that – going back to what you gentlemen were saying – I don't know that we had a specific vision for a Black Studies program. I mean there were some courses obviously. In fact, I think I remember one I was in with Don Mizell. I think helped construct it. I think it was a liberation theology course or something like that. But I don't think we had a very specific vision about what types of courses should be a part of a Black Studies concentration. I think the focus for the group before us and even ours was the first thing is let's get in some Black professors, because if you bring in the Black professors, the courses, by nature, are going to evolve from there. So I think that was a key consideration. In my freshman year, I think we had only one Black professor. I could be wrong on that.

CE: Was that Asmarom Legesse? The Sociology/Anthropology professor?

JW: I don't remember that name.

HB: It may have been Dr. Morgan.

JW: Well, Dr. Morgan came a little bit later. I think it was... was it Wood¹ or somebody? It was like a history professor. We didn't have very many professors, maybe one or two. In fact, that was part of the impetus to push for the sit-in in the spring of 1970 because some of the promises, I guess, that had been won by the 1969 sit-in were not – there didn't seem to be a momentum there. So one of our key issues was trying to bring in professors and Black administrators. I'm quite sure there were some who were thinking more about the Black Studies program, and some of those evolved. Kathryn Morgan came in, maybe, '74 or '75, I'm not quite sure². But I think their comments were correct,

¹ Jerry Wood, professor of History, was hired for the 1969 – 1970 school year.

²Kathryn Morgan was an instructor in the 1969-1970 academic year. She taught one course in the History Department in 1970 as well as teaching in that year's inaugural Pre-Freshman Summer Program. Dr. Morgan completed a PhD in folklore from the University of Pennsylvania and accepted a position in English at the University of Delaware. She returned to Swarthmore, joining the History Department in 1971 in a three year appointment as an assistant professor, making her the first black female faculty member hired in the history of the College.

which is to say, I don't know if we really had specific courses that we felt were necessary. I know from my own personal background, I was catching up with exactly what Black history is. So, I think anything that was being offered at that point probably would have met a good portion of our needs. So, I would echo a lot of what they said there.

HB: But from listening to some of the discussions with the students that are doing this project, from what I understand, there's only a part time person dedicated to the Black Studies program³. It's hard to see how it could have a real direction – a good consistent direction – that way. We probably would have imagined, especially in forty years, something that would have gotten a little bit further but this is Swarthmore, so....

JW: Right, and one thing now – this probably has a connection to it – but, I remember specifically three – at least one professor and two black administrators – who came in, I think it was my freshman year. Probably by the time of my sophomore year they were gone. So, its like any directions in terms of some leadership either coming from faculty members or college administrators to kind of help give us a point of context in terms of what kind of programs might be appropriate, a lot of those people disappeared pretty quickly. So, you didn't have people who were already graduated who were giving direction, in many cases, as to what the vision of SASS should be for that matter or even what a Black Studies course or concentration should look like.

XL: Thinking autobiographically, how would each of you describe your feelings during the protests? How do these feelings change over time depending on certain events like visitations from concerned loved ones or the addition of new demonstrators? I'll save the Courtney Smith question for a little later.

JW: Okay.

MF: I'm not sure what you mean by the "addition of additional protestors." I'm not sure what that's referring to. What I can speak to, at the moment, was that after all of this had gone down, my father and I had a major, major fight. I don't know what kind of support you guys were getting from your parental units through all of this but I very purposely didn't tell my parents anything at all about this because I knew that if I had, they would have told me to stay out of it. And that's not to say that I was *in* in it the way that these gentlemen were in it, but I did have a role to play after the president died. I called home and my father and I had a major fight which was an ongoing dialogue about his view of what was going around activism and the civil rights movements blah blah blah and what I thought I needed to do and at the end of that conversation he basically said " Well, I'm coming up there this weekend to take you out of school. Cuz I didn't send you up there" – and we all heard this one, right? – "to be running around with no crazy, radical, communist blah blah this blah blah that blah blah that." And at the end of that

³ Black Studies at Swarthmore has a coordinator whose line is divided between the Black Studies department and the department of their specialization. The position is not exactly part-time, but the coordinator's role is split between two departments.

conversation, I said “Well, Dad, if you want to come up here and talk, you can do that but you can’t take me out of school if I don’t want to come out of school. Because I am now in my majority – I didn’t go into all of that – but I basically said if I didn’t want to go I’m not going, he couldn’t do that and that was not something that he particularly wanted to hear. Now, I’m scared because I don’t know where the hell the money’s coming from for that last semester of school but I also have two bets here. One, since it is only one more semester, I don’t think – and Swarthmore being Swarthmore, I figure I’ve got two options: One, I can go to the administration and they will be sure that I get through. Or I could guilt trip our white fellow students by saying “Y’all are always hearing about getting thrown out of school if you’re too active or all this kind of stuff. Well that really happened to me! So let’s pass the hat.” [room laughs] No, but I’m really serious and I’m telling in a joking way too but I had thought this through partly as we were having this conversation and afterwards and that partly is what happened. Bob Barr was the dean of men and the next day or the day after I went to see him and told him what had happened and he basically said “Don’t worry about it. You’ve only got one more year – one more semester to go. We’ll be sure if they if he decides not to pay your tuition for that last semester, we’ll be sure you get through. And then he gave my parents a call basically to tell them that I was only – and I don’t really know what he told my father or my mother because I don’t know if my father had talked to him – but he downplayed my already minor role or at least in my view minor role. It seems that I was a little bit more in the documents than I thought I was. So in terms of autobiography or at least an autobiographical moment or anecdote for you, there is one that I can’t say again I don’t know if your parents were on-board or supporting you guys, how honest you were, but I had not told them a thing and on purpose because I knew what they were seeing in the papers. I also knew that what was being reported, particularly in the Washington Post, which is where I was from, because the post had a very influential columnist who was related to the dean of women? Dean of students? Drew Pearson? And he won’t look unfavorably on what was going down up here.

CE: He was nationally syndicated columnist featured in the Washington Post and hundreds of other papers across the country.

MF: But he was seen all over the country. And I knew that they were seeing him and I knew – since hey I’m just a twenty-year-old know-nothing that if I tell them that’s not how it is, [they will say] “Well I saw it in the Washington Post! That must have been how it was!” But again they had no context or understanding of first of all how that all works and that there was self-serving stuff going on.

HB: My experience is a little bit different than that because I didn’t have that conversation that you had. My parents didn’t send me here in the first place. They had nothing to do with me coming here. They didn’t pay a penny towards me coming here; they couldn’t have if they wanted to. They were glad I was here and in support of – that I was a pioneer. My mother did call me up when we heard about it in the news, when it finally reached the news, to make sure I was okay and that was pretty much it. I was out on my own and they just wanted to make sure I was okay. I don’t recall... Probably the biggest emotions were around after the president died and there definitely were

emotions there about where do we go from here and how did this happen and that sort of thing... I'll pass it to somebody else.

CE: I was elected SASS chairman in the spring of 1968 and I agonized over that decision. I didn't think I was prepared to be the SASS chairman but I had been the vice-chairman and I seemed to be the consensus candidate to become the chairman. So I became the chairman. And when I became chairman in the spring of 1968, not knowing specifically that we would end up occupying the admissions office in January of 1969 but I knew that it was going to be a tumultuous time, maybe a lot of controversial issues without knowing specifically what they were. But when I made the decision to become SASS chairman, I was prepared for whatever. Whatever was going to come, I was prepared for it. Whether I was going to be expelled from Swarthmore or if we got involved in a protest or whether I was going to be arrested or beaten by the police, I was psychologically prepared for that beginning in the spring of 1968. My parents knew I was SASS chairman—they didn't know the details of what was happening—but when we did occupy the admissions office on January 9th, 1969 and the word got out, and then a couple of days later, Drew Pearson, who had gone to Swarthmore, I think he was class of 1919, but his sister was the dean of women, Barbara Lang, had this nationally syndicated column that appeared in the Washington Post and but it also appeared in the New York Post⁴. So he wrote this column that said among other things that "Clinton Etheridge was part of this black militant national conspiracy and Clinton Etheridge would flunk out of Swarthmore and blame it on racial discrimination." So I was told by my sister told me that when my mother saw this read this in the Washington Post, she almost had a nervous breakdown and had to stay in bed for a week! So obviously my parents were concerned, I don't know the details but they concerned about whether I would be expelled from Swarthmore, whether I would be arrested during the occupation or beaten by the police. They were concerned about those things. Those were risks. Thank God they were risks that didn't materialize. But afterwards, when I graduated, when I think the occupation of January 1969 became better understood, they were proud of what I did. Proud that I was a chairman and proud of the role I...but at the time it was very difficult on them. It was a very stressful time for everybody involved.

MF: Now I'm going to just, for a quick diversion, I'm going to just challenge the premise of your question about the nature of autobiography and memory. I would say that people tend to, in creating your own narrative, you want to be the star of your own narrative. There may be editing internally that goes on as you remember events or as you construct that narrative or tell that story to other people. You try to tell it in a way that makes you look good or as good as you can look under the circumstances. I think in looking at autobiography, that's just something that you need to be aware of in terms of it can be a helpful guide, but memory is selective.

CE: Just one quick thing. A lot of things I was prepared for, you know, being expelled, arrested, and beaten by the police. But I, and I don't think anybody else was prepared for

⁴ Drew Pearson was an alum of Swarthmore who became famous for his nationally syndicated column in the *Washington Post* entitled "Washington Merry-Go-Round."

the death of Courtney Smith. The significance of that – that came out of left field for everybody I think January 16th, 1969.

JW: I think the context for those of us who were in the sit-in in 1970 was very different. I only have a vague recollection of – my father probably heard it through the news, and we probably had a disagreement of sorts even though he was involved in the Civil Rights Movement – but the dynamics of spring of '69 were very different from 1970. Now, one thing that came to mind, if I can ask a question: you'll recall Martin Luther King died in April 1968, so I'm just wondering what kind of impact that had on you guys particularly as you were viewing the issues at Swarthmore. I'm wondering what kind of impact that might have had in terms of how you saw the struggle, or, like you said Clint, being prepared, whatever the cost, to pursue the course that was being pursued at that point. Did that have any impact on you guys at all?

CE: Well, it was a traumatic event for everybody who heard about it at the time. It was shocking and distressing.

HB: I don't remember it having a big effect on any decisions we made or anything like that.

CE: No, no, right, I don't think it had a specific effect on SASS deliberations. But it was historic for the concrete of the Civil Rights Movement.

MF: And for the college too, because I think I do remember a day or two after, they kind of shut things down. It was sort of one of the typical, kind of feel good sorts of things. ; They set up discussion groups that, if you wanted to get together and meet on the front lawn of Clothier with your favorite Black student, he could tell you what it all meant. He could help you come to terms and share your grief. I do remember very, very specifically that happened right after.

CE: I feel your pain! I feel your pain! [group laughs]

HB: I just had to wonder and further comment about your original question on the emotions going on is one that I neglected to mention and I really do want to bring it out. My biggest emotions that had around that time, or really shortly afterwards, and probably carry with me today was that, as I said, my parents didn't send me to Swarthmore and I was the first in my family to go to college. Of course, they were proud to have me here. As a result of my involvement in the Civil Rights Movement in Philadelphia and events on campus, my Studies got a little bit behind and I actually flunked out of school that semester and I got readmitted the next week or two. Yeah, I took some extra classes and got readmitted. But I was one week late in finishing the course requirements. I took an outside course at the University of Pennsylvania concurrent with that last spring semester and it ended a week after Swarthmore graduated. So, I wasn't able to walk with the class. My biggest regret was that my parents were not able to see me march at graduation. It's something that I carry with me to this day.

XL: So, I'll ask a question about media coverage. We read a number of articles that were published both from within the community and without. We read a few Phoenix articles in which some of the perspectives were really slanted and others were, as you said in *The Crucible of Character*, pretty grounded in trying to have unbiased coverage. So, can we talk about how it differed in how people were feeling ~~in~~ reading these newspapers, scandalizing this event, any publications that you've written, and how those were received?

JW: So a lot of the questions you're addressing or asking are really principally geared towards the '69 event. I didn't come in until the fall and then we had that secondary situation. But again the dynamics – what happened in my class couldn't have happened without the impetus flowing from the '69 event.

XL: And even though a lot of these questions do seem to be like pointed at '69, the questions that are more about the protests themselves – they're completely opened to the sit-in that was conducted in 1970 as well as the one that I think happened in 1972. [to crew] Was that in something we read? There was another event that happened a few years after 1969 so there was stuff happening – we're not just focused on this one particular January event.

JW: Okay. Okay. Because I commented in my testimony – not testimony, sorry – my interview to what was going on campus related to the Black students in my freshman year. There was a great kind of Marxist-Leninist movement going on and it was the time of the bombings in Cambodia. So actually in the end of the first – the second semester – our second semester was abbreviated at some point because I remember not taking finals for a couple of classes because the college basically shut down because of all the protests that were going on nationally relating to the Cambodian— You know you had like, Kent State and some other stuff like that going on so it was a kind of different twist and dynamic going on there.

CE: And you say Marxist-Leninist... so who was leading that? The SDS people or...?

JW: Well you had SDS....was it SDS? Well, you had a couple of professors and I don't remember their names but there were a couple of professors...

MF: Bradley.

JW: Thompson Bradley and there was another guy.

CE: Who taught Russian.

MF: That was Bradley. He was the Russian novel guy. Maybe Schuldenfrei. Reggie Schuldenfrei⁵?

⁵ Richard Schuldenfrei, a professor of philosophy was hired for the 1966-1967 school year.

JW: Could have been. There was a guy – oh I can remember. He had you know long, you know stringy...I don't know if stringy hair....but long hair. I certainly remember Bradley's name, though.

MF: Yeah, Bradley was one of the more progressive/radicals – whichever word you want to use.

JW: Right, I remember being in Tarble, and I think it was the end of freshman year, right before college was closed off, that – Tarble had a second tier, or a balcony or something as I recall – and I remember looking over the balcony because the whole Tarble was – these professors and some other people, the labor committee and some others were making various presentations related to the Socialist or Marxist type stuff. So, that was a very big thing going on my freshman year.

CE: So, was it organized by one specific group or was it a number of groups or a coalition?

JW: It seems to me that it was a number of groups. But the labor committee or the labor party or something seemed to be...

MF: I think it would have been the labor committee. That would be my guess.

JW: Yeah, probably the labor committee was a big part of it.

CE: I don't remember the labor committee in our day.

JW: Yeah, and it could have been just it springing out of the Vietnam stuff going on at that point.

CE: Of course, I remember the SDS – the SDS existed in our time.

JW: Yeah, it could be that SDS might have been a part of it too, but I don't remember them. I know specifically the labor committee was. But a lot of it was because of the bombing that started probably...

MF: Cambodia?

JW: Yeah, Cambodia.

CE: So, ready to roll again?

XL: So I'll repeat the question: So the first question is: media coverage at the time of the protest as well as the 1970 protest which you were a part of [to James White] and how it was reflected in the Phoenix and how things were slanted to vilify and criminalize this protest as well as in the context of the protests that were going on across the country at this time. We've already mentioned *the Washington Post*...

CE: Right well I would just say that there were –I remember more examples of unfair and biased coverage in the outside media. So the Drew Pearson piece... “Clinton Etheridge is part of a vast Black militant conspiracy. He’s going to flunk out of Swarthmore and blame it on racial discrimination.” And then the day we vacated the admissions office – January 16th 1969 – we had conducted a very disciplined, dignified, nonviolent demonstration and there was no destruction of property, there was no violence. And we had occupied the admissions office for about a week but we sort of cleaned up to the best we could before we vacated the premises and one of the Philadelphia newspapers, I think it was *the Philadelphia Daily News* said that we trashed the place. And that is...that is...you know, so they just lied. And that is what we had to the best of our ability tried to avoid. Being you know...

HB: It wasn’t a lie, Clinton. They just filled in the missing information. [laughs] They just filled in the facts.

CE: No, no, we didn’t trash the place. We didn’t trash the place. We didn’t trash the place.

HB: They weren’t lying.

MF: They were distorting the way that....

HB: They were just being journalistic.

MF: Wait a minute Harold...

CE: We had taken so much time and effort to clean up the place, to be disciplined and then to have a bold-faced lie like that flash across the Philadelphia newspaper like that.

MF: And I think again context here is very very important. I don’t think, even at our young age back then, that were naive enough to expect to get quote “fair and accurate” coverage from the outside press. Whether we were expecting to be lied about is whole ‘nother issue. Because in our innocence and naiveté, we didn’t understand that yes the press sometimes lies to present or forward a certain agenda and I say that understand as a member of the press for thirty years. So I’m not just...whatever. I think internally—I think the Phoenix did a pretty good job. I’ve been looking back over some of the coverage before I did this this weekend just to sort of see what kind of recollection.... and I think on the whole that they did a reasonable job.

CE: and I would agree with that. Right.

MF: The other thing that you also have to understand is what was...what had happened in other sort of actions that Black students had staged at other campuses and universities. At Cornell, you had students walking out and holding guns. And that just is a mind...fuck for a lot of white people who are seeing that. That just throws their narrative off about a

whole lot of things whole different kinds of ways. The problem that was going on here was it did not really fit any of the other narratives of any of the other confrontations that went on that country—those years coming up to that and here's why. To my mind, and you can—I may be – I think that the rules of engagement were clear from the beginning. So as long as SASS didn't destroy any property, the administration wasn't going to call in the police. I don't remember at what point they granted amnesty but it was sort of implicit and understood in that as part of if you will the Swarthmore social contract. Because if they had busted us with cops, then the white kids would have torn this place down. They would have had bigger problems than they had because then they would have been exposed for real hypocrites as opposed to marginal hypocrites as perhaps things turned out that it showed. And I think that was different in that the SASS folks were very smart and very shrewd in terms of how they managed the conflict and like I said I think the administration also understood that they had to be careful too because otherwise there'd be a lot more bullshit that they'd have to deal with than turns out. And that was not a narrative that you were seeing in other places because again there may have been some truth to crazy radicals. Folks here may have been radical but they weren't crazy.

CE: Yeah I would agree with that for the most part.

JW: Were you guys aware of the FBI being on campus? Was that issue for you at all?

HB: knowing the kinds of things the FBI did we suspected they were around somewhere.

CE: But it wasn't – I don't think anybody thought it was as bad as it turned out to be. So this book came out in January – *The Burglary*⁶ -- about the burglary of the FBI office in Media. So among other things – some thousands of pages that got burglarized – there were informants at Swarthmore. The bureau police chief in Swarthmore was an informant for the FBI. The switch board operator for Swarthmore was an informant for the FBI and the assistant registrar was an informant for the FBI. Then in 1970, J. Edgar Hoover sends out a memo saying okay all Black students need to be under surveillance. They're a very disruptive force and a threat to national security. So, the Philadelphia office sends back a memo saying we have every Black student in Swarthmore under surveillance. So, this was inconceivable to me that this could have been happening, but it did.

JW: We were aware of people who were either suspected to be informants – and I think later we discovered some of that. Maybe even some of them inducing students to carry guns and that kind of thing.

CE: At Swarthmore?

JW: Yeah.

⁶ *The Burglary* is a book written by Betty Medsger about the disappearance of confidential files from the Media office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

CE: Really, wow.

MF: Wow, yeah, no kidding.

JW: It was an isolated situation.

MF: Yeah, I'm not surprised that the FBI was keeping an eye on us. But when I learned that we all had files, that did seem to be a little much.

XL: The second part of the question which is about publications that you men have done since this event, or since the two protests. We actually became aware that you've published something. [To Clinton Etheridge] If you could talk about *The Crucible of Character* and how your narratives have, if anything, attempted to change the way these events were perceived.

JW: Actually the article I wrote, which I just saw for the first time in forty years downstairs today actually, that was actually prior to the '70 sit in. It was composed sometime in the October/November '69. It was kind of as a lead up. I probably wrote it three or four times, because as it became known, particularly to some people in SASS that I was writing it, it became more of a piece, kind of a PR piece on what were some of the inconsistencies we saw in terms of the administration, etcetera. When the article started out it was like, what's it like being a Black freshman at Swarthmore? Then it evolved in its final draft to bring in some of the issues that I became aware of as I got closer to SASS. So really my publication, or that particular article was prior to the event.

CE: In terms of *The Crucible of Character*, it was published in March of 2005. The day we got out of the admissions office, January 16th, 1969, I said to myself, "Hey, I need to write about this. I'm the chairman, I know a lot about this." But, life happened. I had to focus on graduating by June. So, I had to do what I needed to do between January and June to graduate. Thank God, I was able to graduate. Then, as I said, life happened. A year later, I went into the Peace Core for two years in Africa in Gambia, then after that I went to Stanford Business School, then I got married, then I had kids, so life happened. It wasn't until years later, in July of 2003, I had prostate surgery and that was a wake up call for me. I said, "Gee, Clinton, you're not getting any younger, you're not getting any healthier." Around that time, my father was starting to get early Alzheimer's. I said today you have your sound body and mind, but the window of opportunity is going to be closing. I said to myself, "Clinton, on your death bed you don't want to say, I should have written that Swarthmore article!"

MF: Rosebud.

CE: Something like that. So, that was a wake up call and a motivator and I started writing it. It took the better part of a year. I think I was able to produce a better piece because I was older, more mature, and I was able to put things in better perspective, what I call the long view of history. I cranked it out, came up with a draft, showed it to some friends and associates, and negotiated with the Swarthmore Bulletin and finally it got published in

March of 2005. I said in the author's note that this is a personal memoir. I'm not a SASS historian, I'm not a spokesman anymore for Black students, past or present. This is just my personal memoir. But because I was chairman, I thought my recollections and viewpoint on the crisis could be helpful. Then I urged others to pick up where I leave off. I didn't try to portray it as *the* history of the occupation. This is one person's personal memoir, recollections and viewpoint on the crisis. But I think it was important because, as of that point, March of 2005, nobody Black who had been directly involved had gone on the record. There had been a couple of pieces that had been written. In May of 1969, Life Magazine did something and the college did something from time to time. As I mentioned, one of my classmates from the Class of '69, Darwin Stapleton, wrote a biography of Courtney Smith, and he had a chapter on the takeover, which, with all due respect, I thought was a hatchet job on us⁷. I say this in the authors note: if you don't write your own story, someone else will write it for you and they may or may not get it right. So, as I said, I had been thinking of it from January 16th, 1969, but life happened. Then I get the wakeup call with the prostate surgery, and I said, Clinton, get this thing out before it's too late. So, that's what I did.

MF: I also had, immediately afterwards, thought something needs to be written about this. I thought about doing something but I didn't. Then, in 1999, I started trying to do a version of it as fiction, not as reportage. I actually have a bit more than I thought I had because I went back and dug it out. But I was out in California then, and I thought of looking you up to interview you just to talk to you about it. Just to see if I could round out some of both the details. But unfortunately I never followed through to finish it. I'm very good at starting things and not finishing them, and that's one of them.

XL: Those are all of the questions that we have. If you have any questions that you would like to ask each other?

Martin Silva: I want to hear a bit more about the 1970 sit-in if you would like to share a bit more about that.

JW: Again, in the fall semester of '69, we had a large class come in, somewhere between 30 and 33 students. Obviously we were coming in naïve. A lot of the leaders of the '69 sit in or takeover had graduated. All three of these gentlemen, for example, had graduated. So, at the time I think Don Mizell was chairman of SASS. Russell Frisby I think might have been vice-chairman. Through a process of orientation as we were coming in as freshman, a good portion of us became connected to SASS. Even though we had heard some of the history – I actually got a lot more history from that DVD or that thing that was published most recently. I really didn't have a full context of what the people who went through the sit-in in 1969 went through. I didn't realize that you guys had left campus and were housed at some churches, or something like that.

CE: The Media Fellowship House.

⁷ Darwin Stapleton, '69, wrote a biography of Courtney Smith called *Dignity, Discourse and Destiny: The Life of Courtney Smith* which was published in 2003 by the University of Delaware Press.

JW: Media Fellowship House, right. There were some aspects of that history that those of us who became acclimated to SASS hadn't really understood all of that. But I think the general context of what we were looking for in terms of Black Studies and more Black professors and we wanted to continue the rate of matriculation of Black students coming in. So, over a period of time, we had some negotiations with the administration. I became a member of the steering committee somewhere in the Fall of the year...

CE: Now what steering committee was that?

JW: This was SASS.

CE: SASS steering committee?

JW: Yeah. I think there were four members, and they had an election, and I fortunately or unfortunately became the fifth. We were interacting with the administration, but I think a lot of that was led by I think Don [Mizell] and maybe the vice-chair there. At some point it became clear that we weren't making much progress on those goals. Now, in retrospect as I'm looking back, and we just had that conversation before we started taping again. President Cross, that was his first year. He was probably getting his feet wet. Probably trying to get a sense of what was going on here. The prior president has died so he was probably trying to figure out things out in his first year and that may explain some of the slowness in the process or he may run into some resistance from some of the existing people who were in the administration when he came in. As we went into 1970, we started I guess ramping up the pressure at a certain point. Probably in February and March. And I remember very specifically – I said this in my interview – the Black students used to eat in a certain section of Tarble. We had a section there and as we began to move toward the sit-in, we actually pulled the tables together in one long line in Tarbles – in the middle of Tarbles, oh not Tarbles, Sharples – and at that point I think the college community started to get a little bit nervous. [group laughter] We would all gather at the same time for the most part, eat at the same time. We always pulled the tables together. I think the next day we had to pull the tables together again. So people started to get a little bit nervous. [room laughs] To further ramp up the pressure, a large number of us paid a visit to the president's house in the evening hours and you know we had some torches and conga drums...

CE: KKK fashion [group laugh]

JW: Only without the sheets! But I think we scared the president and his family a little bit. I can kind of vaguely remember their faces looking out of the windows

HB: As the helicopters.... [group laughs]

CE: They didn't call the police?

JW: No, but here's the interesting thing: We found out later that they knew about the torches. I think they were allowing us to use one of the rooms in Bond and we had them locked up there and we later found out they knew about them. So obviously somebody was coming behind us, informing, or checking that out. I'm not quite sure how much farther from that point but I think at midnight, I think the night before the sit-in, all the Black students, or a good portion of Black students, we congregated at Bond, one of the Bond areas

CE: Midnight? At midnight?

JW: Yeah it was around midnight. Congregated there and then I believe the next morning that's when myself and around four others walked into the president's office and read some statement – I don't even remember what it was – and essentially said we were going to be there for a while. He continued working and then at a certain point he just decided—I guess we were too much of a distraction so he left the office. And there were a number – there were a large number of Black students in the outer office and after a period of a couple of days, I don't recall how many, but I know it was at least one evening into the next day we were there until we were able to negotiate and get some progress and some commitment from the college that they were going to start moving on some of those things. So as a result of that, the Black Cultural Center, which was one of the initiatives that the prior class was looking for, really came into fruition. By the time of my sophomore year, we actually were putting together shelving for the library, etc. The Black Cultural Center started in my sophomore year. We made a lot of progress from that point until the next semester.

XL: It's been about an hour and a half. Well, since we started filming about an hour and fifteen minutes. So if there are no more questions, we can wrap things up.

Martin Silva: Anything else you want to add?

MF: Yeah – Oh, I'm sorry, go ahead.

HB: No, I was just going to say it's a good discussion.

MF: It was a good discussion. One thing that I will throw out generally, and it was something that I said in my statement too. I think that one of the tragedies of Courtney [Smith] dying was that, if I remember correctly, and you can correct me if I'm wrong here, that was the day that there was going to be the decisive faculty vote.

CE: I don't remember the details of what the faculty was doing and when they were doing it.

MF: Ok. Again, this may just be my misremembering or whatever. But, I think one of the tragedies in terms of that situation was that we never knew what the faculty was going to do or where they actually had come down on it. Because one of the things had been, at least from my reading of the situation, that there was a chance that the faculty might have

decided to give SASS what it wanted on SASS's terms or closer to SASS's terms than they would have expected to get. Because of his passage, and what happened, we'll never know the answer to that question. So, there you go.

XL: Any more closing statements?

JW: I am glad to see that this is being done. One thing that I commented on which is kind of interesting is that I believe that we still had a significant number of students come in in the years after mine, maybe not thirty, but I guess 25 give or take.

MF: Was that in each class?

JW: Yeah, in each class. I think we got around 25-ish on average probably the last three years. I sometimes wonder if the college became more selective in terms of the students that they were looking to bring in. Particularly because for two consecutive years, they had had a sit in or a takeover of some sort. You'd have to go back to the records, but I almost wonder if they were looking for a different caliber of Black student or perhaps students who would not necessarily have been as activist as prior students.

MF: How would you screen for that [Clinton Etheridge laughs.]

JW: I don't know how you would screen for that. Maybe that's just my conspiracy theory.

MF: No, because I think a lot of folks got radicalized in college. That was one of the processes that we experienced. One of the things that the experience did – and it's not clear, again, when you're talking about your needs as Black students today – it gave a lot of us an analytical framework with which to approach life, race, power issues going forward. I think it was a real beginning for us. Because at that point we were just kids, we didn't really have that.

HB: I one hundred percent agree. If they had looked at me in high school, I would have been on top of their list.

MF: Again, I had done a little picketing, but my folks weren't going to let me get too deep into stuff. But at the same time, like I said, having some kind of context, some kind of analysis to look at race in America and how I, or this group, or we fit into that narrative in that historical moment as well. Because again, remember these were some trying and some troubling, troubling times.

CE: Tumultuous times.

JW: Absolutely.

MF: There was a lot of stuff going on. This was just part of it.

JW: Just part of it, right.

MF: We also had sex, drugs, and rock and roll. They were not insignificant. And Vietnam and feminism and other gender stuff. All of that simultaneously – and again, nobody has a view trying to connect those dots and pulling things together until it began to happen here. I don't know what informs the Swarthmore education these days, but there was a lot of Marxist analysis going around. Regardless of how Marx stands and what repute he is in now, he does provide a jumping off point from wherever else it takes you or wherever else you want to go. Because one of the things that I think we're beginning to see in America, and seeing in other places too is how class is coming back to bite us in the butt. The interplay of race and class these days is very much more with us in a self-aware way, I think, than it was then. In those days it was race or it was class. It was almost an either/or. Not for everybody. I don't know again in how you guys are getting educated, what kind of an analytical framework you're being provided with. For us, Swarthmore was the first place and through partially this experience where we began to get an analysis that helped us understand power, helped us understand race and how we were going to deal with it going forward.

XL: Alright. Thank you for this interview.

MS: Thank you very much.

MF: So can we eat now? You look like you want to say something Clint.

CE: No, no. I'm done.